



Brentwood approves rezone for 160-house cluster development

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BRENTWOOD — On Tuesday night, the City Council approved a change in zoning for an anticipated 160 homes on a 20-acre lot on the 2800 block of Empire Avenue north of WinCo Foods.

The area was previously zoned for 15 acres of mixed use business park and 5 acres of very high-density residential use, because the owner, Michael Orfanos, wanted to continue his plant nursery business there. However, the plant nursery closed years ago.

The development will have 160 units that would be grouped in clusters of six, each with its own private alleys that access each cluster. Lot sizes start at 3,000 square feet and go up to 5,400 square feet. A total of 784 parking spaces would accommodate residents, as well as the public who could visit the two pocket parks that will dedicated to the city.

“There will be full porches where you can sit, have a chair and a drink and wave to your neighbor and create a sense of community,” architect Ralph Strauss of SDG Architects Inc. said.



An overall landscape plan prepared for the 160 house development on the 2800 block of Empire Ave. (provided photo)

The Planning Commission was concerned that rezoning the area to remove commercial use while adding more residential was contrary to the general plan, which calls for a better balance of land uses so that the city was not overly dependent on one source of revenue. Currently, the city is at approximately 70 percent of the general plan's build-out target for residential and 37 percent of the target for jobs.

The commission also found that the five-acre "island" of commercial area in the middle was inconsistent with the residential land surrounding it on three sides and that the additional 2.5 acres of park was in line with the city's conservation and open space policies.

"I think this is designed for one of the greater areas of need in Brentwood — that is, young families coming back to town that are wanting to purchase a new home," said Vice Mayor Joel Bryant. Although Bryant added that it was an odd location for these homes, they would fit a need in the market that the city wants to encourage.

To approve the rezone, city council members first had to approve a mitigated negative declaration that approved a number of steps the developer would take to reduce "potentially significant impacts" on aesthetics, biological resources, air quality and noise among others.

The decision to rezone the property conflicts with a council decision in 2015 to designate Orfanos' property and surrounding properties within zone PD-38 as potential sites for an emergency homeless shelter.

While the area is still zoned for an emergency shelter as required by state law, the city's staff report argued that "changing the land use for this project essentially removes 15 acres of land that would allow for an emergency shelter..."

With the approval of a 48-lot residential development at the Alvernaz property to the south, this leaves only two properties to the north of the development, a total of 18 acres, available for use as an emergency shelter.

Orfanos was a [vocal opponent of the decision at the time](#), saying that no homeowners in the area would agree to build an emergency homeless shelter on their land.